

White Evangelicals Consider Themselves a 'Religious Minority' in America

These are anxious times for white evangelicals, according to two new surveys.

At 20 percent of U.S. adults, they are statistically neck-and-neck with the "nones"—people who claim no religious affiliation. "Nones" now tally up to 19 percent in the 2014 American Values Survey released Sept. 23 by the Public Religion Research Institute.

Evangelicals, said Jones, "are on the losing side of the **culture wars** such as gay marriage. And they see that their share [of society] is shrinking and aging, adding to their sense of being embattled," said Robert P. Jones, CEO of PRRI.

"They can no longer say confidently they speak for all people of faith," Jones added.

No other religious group is more worried than white evangelicals that the government will interfere with their **religious liberty**.

According to PRRI, 46 percent of Americans overall—including 66 percent of white evangelicals—say they are concerned about "the government interfering with the ability of people to freely practice their religion."

Meanwhile, 46 percent overall say they're more concerned with "religious groups trying to pass laws that force their beliefs on others." That includes 63 percent of "nones" and 51 percent of Catholics.

The Pew Research Center's newest survey, released Monday, asked people about which groups faced "significant

discrimination” in American society.

On a list of eight groups, gays and lesbians led with 65 percent of all surveyed saying this group was under the gun. Atheists were cited next at 59 percent. But, only 31 percent overall considered white evangelicals to be victims of “significant discrimination.”

Yet, among themselves, 50 percent of white **evangelicals** see themselves as victims. That’s an unrivaled 19 percentage-point gap in social perception.

“This is directly related to the current political climate, with all the voices of Republicans in the 2012 presidential campaign claiming there’s a ‘war on religion,’” said David Campbell, professor of political science at the University of Notre Dame.

“It fits a historical narrative of feeling under attack and, to a certain extent, this is part of how white evangelicals thrive,” said Campbell.

About one in three white evangelicals say it has become more difficult to be a person of their faith in the U.S. today, according to the Pew survey. And about the same number say they think of themselves as a religious minority because of their beliefs. No other group comes close to this sense of unease.

But white evangelicals are not alone in America’s gloomy mood. The PRRI American Values Survey is subtitled “Worries about Economic Inequality and Insecurity.”

Key findings include:

- **Unchanged politics:** Just as they did in 2012, white Protestants overwhelmingly say they expect to vote Republican, while most black Protestants, white and Hispanic Catholics, Jews and people who don’t identify

with any denomination say they'll vote for Democrats.

- Weak tea: The tea party is down to 7 percent of Americans, down from 11 percent 2010. It remains centered in the religious right (47 percent). "But we still see them having significant difference with the Republican Party on issues they are strong about such as immigration," said Jones.
- Economic insecurity: 72 percent overall believe the economy is still in a recession today. Almost six in 10 Americans report being in only fair financial condition (37 percent) or poor financial shape (20 percent). Jones said, "Economic insecurity remains highly stratified by race, with nearly six in 10 black Americans living in households with high or moderate levels of economic insecurity."
- More hunger. Jones was particularly alarmed that "36 percent say they or someone in their family has reduced meals or cut back on food to save money over the course of the last year. That's a pretty serious economic hardship."
- Dreams diminished: 42 percent say "the American dream—that if you work hard, you'll get ahead—still holds true today." Black Americans are the most pessimistic: Only 31 percent say it still holds true.
- Unequal justice: 84 percent of blacks, 60 percent of Hispanics and 51 percent of non-Hispanic white Americans say minorities do not receive the same treatment as white Americans in the criminal-justice system.

An unarmed black teenager, Michael Brown, was killed in Ferguson, Missouri, Aug. 9, during the final week the PRRI survey was being conducted (July 21-Aug. 15). Jones said that during the last week of research, as demonstrations in Ferguson led nightly newscasts nationwide, a higher percentage of African-Americans and other minorities said they see unequal justice.

The PRRI telephone survey of 4,507 U.S. adults was conducted in English and Spanish. The margin of error is plus or minus 1.8 percentage points.

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